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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PETRESKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

later: Mr. STADTHAGEN (Nicaragua)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 95: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued) (A/50/123-S/1995/228, A/50/254-S/1995/201, A/50/255-S/1995/504, A/50/400, A/50/407, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/466-S/1995/817, A/50/475, A/50/487, A/50/518)

(b) HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (A/50/8 and Add.1)

(c) UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (Habitat II) (A/50/37, A/50/411, A/50/519)

1. Mr. N'DOW (Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)), speaking also in his capacity as Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), said that the changing global political, economic and social environment required that Governments and multilateral organizations adjust development strategies to meet the needs of a transformed world. The United Nations system must attach the highest priority to strengthening human security, developing human potential and thereby building hope. Development of human settlements - both in urban and rural areas - had become a priority challenge for the international community. The forthcoming Conference was part of the continuum of United Nations conferences that had begun at Rio, a continuum that was rewriting the economic, social and, perhaps, political agenda of the international community for the twenty-first century and was providing a more holistic and humane message about global problems and the solutions they required.

2. The preparatory process for the Conference was moving forward vigorously, as 134 countries engaged in national preparatory activities and in initiatives involving all sectors of society. For example, work was under way in more than 100 countries on the "best practices" initiative for improving the living environment, and a conference on the subject was to be held the following week in the municipality of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. More than 100 workshops would be held throughout the world covering a range of relevant issues. Those workshops had been sponsored by international organizations, Governments, local authorities, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, community groups and professionals.

3. At the regional level, a recent conference of African ministers responsible for housing and human settlements had unanimously adopted a declaration which testified to the importance which those countries attached to attaining the goals of Habitat II. Similar meetings were planned or had already been held in other regions.

4. The preparatory process had resulted in the forging of many new alliances and partnerships. Perhaps the most significant was the one that had brought together the secretariat of the Conference and the major international and regional associations of local authorities and their steering committee.

5. Preparation of the plan of action to be adopted at the Conference also was well advanced. An informal inter-sessional drafting group comprising

representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations and local authorities from all regions had recently made considerable progress drafting a text which he was confident would win wide support.

6. The outcome of the deliberations of the fifteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements had made it clear that Governments looked to the Conference for solutions capable of generating economic growth, alleviating poverty and enhancing the urban environment, for a global plan of action capable of advancing and integrating the goals of the other recent United Nations conferences and for strategies and philosophies of enablement to make the goal of the Conference - better housing for all - a reality. At its second session, the Preparatory Committee for the Conference had recommended, inter alia, approval of a rule of procedure that would allow local authorities to participate in the Conference. He hoped that the recommendation would be adopted.

7. With regard to financing, the Preparatory Committee had called upon countries to increase their contributions to the relevant trust funds and had requested the General Assembly to allocate, within existing United Nations resources, sufficient funds to cover key operational tasks of the Conference. In-kind and earmarked contributions continued to outpace cash contributions and, although the Secretariat had made commendable progress with the limited resources at its disposal, more resources were needed as the preparatory process entered its critical final phase. He was confident that the required support would be forthcoming and was optimistic about the outcome of the Conference, given the political support demonstrated thus far by national and local governments, organizations and people at all levels of society.

8. He looked forward to a Conference of partnerships. For North and South, the future of human settlements would not be determined by bricks and mortar alone. It was human solidarity that would transform the physical environment into homes and settlements. History, geography and social change created the context for human solidarity, rational processes built cities, but faith, loyalty, honour and trust among its members created communal life. He urged the Committee's support to attain that goal.

9. Ms. REBONG (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reiterated the views of those delegations as stated at the fifteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements. The Commission should continue to focus on the provision of shelter for all through a comprehensive and integrated approach which viewed urban and rural settlements as integral parts of the development of sustainable human settlements. Access by the poor to critical resources, in particular land and finance, should be addressed. Support should be enhanced for the efforts of the developing countries, in particular, the least developed among them, to provide adequate shelter for their people and the importance of the participation of women in finding solutions to the shelter problem, particularly in the case of households headed by women, should be emphasized.

10. The right to adequate housing as a basic human right was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Notwithstanding the endorsement by the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 and by Agenda 21 of the need to

accord priority to programmes for the provision of adequate shelter for all, financial and technical support to that end had been inadequate. Although it was true that national Governments must bear the primary responsibility for the full implementation of the Global Strategy, international support, in particular assistance to enhance the capacity of Governments as facilitators in the shelter sector, was crucial. The two themes of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) were crucial for the implementation of the Global Strategy.

11. Ms. MENENDEZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that improving human settlements and housing conditions was of the utmost importance in efforts to combat urban poverty, unemployment, violence and social disintegration and to protect the environment. It was therefore a central factor for development and played a key role with respect to cultural identity. The States members of the European Union looked forward to the adoption at the Conference of a statement of principles and a global plan of action which promoted sustainable development through a participatory approach, reflected the positions of all involved in the negotiations and clearly set out the political messages on choices that must be made to meet the challenges at hand. They reaffirmed their commitment to that objective. The European Union would continue to participate actively and constructively in the preparations for the Conference and at the Conference itself.

12. The involvement of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and local authorities, in the preparatory process was very important. Local activities to implement Agenda 21 should be acknowledged in the preparations. Since the issue of the right to housing presented difficulties, the proposed expert meeting on the topic should be organized as soon as possible. The Conference should have a practical orientation and should take into account the outcomes of all recent major conferences.

13. Mr. CELEM (Turkey) said that all nations faced problems of urbanization caused by explosive population growth and by the pressures of migration to urban centres. Natural disasters and wars also left many people homeless. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) should translate the decisions and resolutions of other recent major global conferences into concrete action in support of sustainable development. In that connection, he summarized the overall objectives relating to shelter contained in Agenda 21.

14. It was important to ensure participation at the highest level, and participation should be broadly based. The global plan of action to be adopted by the Conference should present a new orientation and targets which should be translated into commitments and action by all concerned. His delegation hoped that further progress would be made on the draft text of the plan and that the Preparatory Committee would be in a position at its third session to produce a satisfactory document with as few brackets as possible.

15. His country was pleased to host the Conference. Istanbul, the Conference site, would serve as a laboratory for finding solutions to the problems to be discussed at the Conference. The results of its efforts to revive its natural beauty and historic splendour provided a good example of best practices. A broad-based national committee with 140 representatives from various sectors had

been established to facilitate the preparatory work for the Conference, and a successful regional preparatory meeting had been held at Ankara in October 1995. A host committee had been established to facilitate preparations for the concurrent non-governmental organizations forum to be held during Habitat II. A self-financing international trade fair was being organized and would focus on innovative, low-cost, appropriate and environmentally sound products, services and technologies in the fields of housing, construction and human settlements. Fifteen per cent of the exhibition space would be made available free of charge for use by firms from the least developed countries.

16. Mr. WANG Xuexian (China) said that the solution to the problem of human settlements in the developing countries lay in the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustained economic development. Efforts were also needed to curb population growth and reinforce environmental protection. It would be necessary to mobilize resources from public and private organizations, and both domestic and foreign sources. There was need for vigorous and intensified international cooperation, and developed countries should provide new and additional resources to developing countries and promote the transfer of technology on favourable terms. Women should be enabled to participate effectively and their interests fully taken into account wherever possible.

17. There could not be any uniform model for human settlements. Each country needed to formulate its own strategy and policies in the light of its own specific conditions while following the guidelines of the United Nations instruments on human settlements.

18. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements working in conjunction with other relevant organs should strengthen capacity-building in developing countries in the field of human settlements so as to contribute to the attainment of the goals set forth in the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 and the effective implementation of the relevant chapters of Agenda 21. The Centre should also play a leading role in the preparatory process for Habitat II.

19. China had formulated a series of housing and urban development policies in keeping with its actual conditions. It would pursue unremittingly its efforts to improve the urban environment, control urban population growth, improve the conditions for human settlements and increase employment opportunities.

20. In preparation for Habitat II, China had set up a National Preparatory Committee, dealing with disseminated information on Habitat II through the media and organized various seminars to increase public participation. Housing agencies and civil society were being encouraged to engage in various activities in the field and information on human settlements was being collected and distributed to the public. China had also been drafting its national report and programme of action. As part of the preparatory work for Habitat II, an exhibition on China's achievements in improving the living environment had been held during the Fourth World Conference on Women.

21. Finally, he drew attention to the question of posts for Chinese translators. Although the budget of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements provided for such posts, no Chinese translators had ever been hired.

He hoped that the secretariat would take prompt action to ensure that the Chinese language was treated in a fair manner.

22. Mr. ELDEEB (Egypt) said that inasmuch as the issues of society, environment, population, development, women and human settlements were interrelated, Habitat II would be the final link in the chain of international conferences organized by the United Nations, in which the human being was the focus of economic and social development.

23. Egypt stressed the need for sustainable transport systems, which constituted the backbone of the development of human settlements, and especially land transport systems. Emphasis should therefore be given, within the context of international and regional cooperation, to the development of the transport sector in human settlements in developing countries and the provision of the requisite funds.

24. His delegation agreed that particular attention should be given to the problems of cities, but noted that rural development was also important and should not be ignored. He stressed the importance of decentralization and of strengthening the role of local authorities and grass-roots organizations in cooperation with Governments, with the assistance of the international community.

25. The success of the development of human settlements would depend in large measure on the participation of all the main actors in the implementation of the global plan of action to be adopted: the private sector, non-governmental organizations, grass-roots organizations and international organizations. Egypt hoped that the plan of action would focus particular attention on the poorer and more crowded areas of the developing countries, especially in Africa.

26. His delegation supported the recommendations contained in the report of the Preparatory Committee (A/50/37) for the completion of the preparatory process with a view to arriving at a global plan of action that took into account the problems and needs of every region. It hoped the Committee's third substantive session would be an earnest negotiating process aimed at the drafting of an integrated document covering both objectives and the means for implementing the global plan of action, defining programmes and financing sources. It also hoped that the various agencies and organizations would take that opportunity to make known their commitments within the framework of cooperation with Governments; in that connection he drew attention to the considerable activity of the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC) in the area of advancement of human settlements in the Arab region.

27. Greater concentration on the elimination of poverty was a basic condition for the sustainable development of human settlements. That meant satisfying the needs of low-income groups and providing productive employment opportunities, especially for the youth. International cooperation aimed at the achievement of those goals would bring social integration and stability in human settlements.

28. Egypt had participated actively in the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and in the related follow-up work for the implementation of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000. It had set up a national

committee on human settlements that was coordinating joint efforts among Government organs, local authorities and non-governmental organizations with a view to effective participation in the preparatory process and in the Conference.

29. Egypt accorded priority to the housing sector in its Government programmes, and had adopted short-, medium- and long-term housing development plans to meet the country's urgent and growing demand for housing. In addition, the Government had taken serious steps to encourage private investment in housing. It was also encouraging private construction and housing associations to establish small human settlements in new Government-planned towns in which the necessary infrastructure work was being carried out, with a view to alleviating the pressure on the major cities.

30. Moreover, the Government was helping young people establish small production units and reclaim desert land for agricultural use for graduates of universities and technical institutes, with a view to establishing productive rural human settlements and reducing the growing demand for administrative jobs. That would help to further conversion to a market economy within the framework of the structural adjustment programme being carried out since 1990. As those projects needed further support and financing, his country welcomed the participation of the private sector, United Nations agencies and international financial institutions in that area, too.

31. Mr. RONNEBERG (Marshall Islands) said that his country, like many others which did not have an Embassy in Nairobi, had been unable to participate in the work of the Preparatory Committee in Nairobi. He expressed concern that no funds had been set aside for such delegations to attend the meetings. Arrangements should be made to accommodate inputs from those who could not be present.

32. The Marshall Islands continued to face tremendous problems in those areas of the country which had been contaminated by nuclear testing. His country was seeking assistance in three main areas. Firstly, there was need to improve and to disseminate information on radiation levels present in the environment. Secondly, there was a need for further research into the adverse health implications of radiation exposure on human beings, including a study on the different ways radiation affected men, women and children. Lastly, and most important, was a need to restore the environment of irradiated lands to internationally acceptable levels for human habitation, taking into account the principle of "the polluter pays". In pursuing those concerns, his delegation intended to be guided by internationally negotiated and accepted texts. He hoped that the international community would support such proposals, and that there would be a renewed commitment to the implementation of the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development relating to the provision of a safe and sustainable human environment.

33. Mr. HALIM (India) said that efforts to improve human settlements should take into account the needs of both urban and rural areas. The overall strategy must comprise a mix of measures including promoting sustainable land-use planning and management, providing integrated environmental infrastructure,

promoting sustainable energy and transport systems, human resource development and capacity-building and improving human settlement management.

34. His Government had contributed US$ 100,000 to the trust fund to facilitate the preparatory process of the Conference scheduled to be held in Istanbul in 1996, in addition to its annual financial contribution to Habitat. It was also finalizing details for a meeting on access to land and security of tenure which it would be hosting in New Delhi from 17 to 19 January 1996. As part of its own national preparations, India was involved in finalizing the national report through a participatory process involving wide debate and consultation. India had also submitted case-studies to the Habitat II secretariat. It was actively preparing for participation in the world fair on building materials and technology scheduled for Istanbul during the Habitat II Conference. He hoped that the international community would provide the necessary financial and technological resources to support the efforts of the developing countries in meeting the challenge.

35. Mrs. ULLOA (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the members of the Rio Group, said that the strong attendance at the recent session of the Preparatory Committee demonstrated the importance that the international community attached to the problem of human settlements. Dealing with the poverty, environmental degradation, unemployment and other negative factors that persisted in both the industrialized and the developing countries would require a global response and the involvement of many different elements, including Government, community-based organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Recent United Nations conferences had touched on the issue of human settlements in their programmes of action and had suggested practical solutions for achieving sustainable development and called for the implementation of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000. She stressed the need for strengthened international cooperation which should be reflected in appropriate financial and technological resources to enable developing countries to implement their national plans.

36. She reaffirmed the commitment of the countries of the Rio Group to work unremittingly in preparation for the Conference. A ministerial meeting on shelter of Latin America and the Caribbean had been held in Ecuador in 1994 and another was scheduled shortly in Santiago, Chile. Latin America and the Caribbean were fully aware of their obligations and responsibilities to achieve sustainable development and provide a better life for their peoples. The time had come for concerted action. It was essential to focus on the human person and to act with responsibility vis-à-vis present and future generations.

37. Mr. SHINODA (Japan) said that his Government recognized the contribution that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements had made and it had contributed $800,000 annually to the Centre for the previous four years. Given that other United Nations bodies had significant responsibilities with respect to issues closely related to human settlements, he called for coordination between the Centre and those organs.

38. Due to the explosive increase in population and rapid urbanization in developing countries, the challenge of ensuring viable human settlements was far greater now than it had been in 1988. In anticipation of the third substantive

session of the Preparatory Committee, he pointed out that the discussions at Habitat II should not simply be a repetition of those which had taken place at the international conferences on related subjects in recent years. Clearly, the declaration issued at the outcome of Habitat II should focus on human settlement questions. The Conference should be considered as a starting-point and Member States and relevant organs of the United Nations system should recognize the importance of following it up with concrete and effective action. It was essential to ensure effective coordination among relevant multilateral financial institutions and other United Nations bodies in follow-up action to Habitat II and other recent United Nations conferences. That was the responsibility of the Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

39. Mr. NG'ENO (Kenya) said that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements played a crucial role as a global focal point for human settlements programmes and activities. It also had the capacity to work with other United Nations agencies in assessing damage to human settlements resulting from natural and manmade disasters and from civil strife, and in assisting in the reconstruction, restoration, and reintegration of affected communities.

40. Noting that by the year 2000, about half the world's population would be living in towns and cities, he said that while most African countries were witnessing high rates of urbanization, most of the region remained largely rural. The forthcoming conference must therefore address not only urban but also rural development. There would also be a need for fresh commitments to provide new and additional resources to supplement national efforts for the implementation of the global plan of action once the latter was adopted. The enabling approach, one of the major strategies in the draft global plan of action, urged Governments to facilitate the efforts of other partnerships in the shelter sector to undertake shelter development. The majority of African countries, however, were not in a position to mobilize adequate local resources from a pure market approach. The need remained to provide safety nets and direct public intervention to provide for the needs of the poor.

41. The Habitat secretariat should be given a clear mandate to coordinate human settlement activities and should be entrusted with the coordination, monitoring and follow-up of implementation of the decisions of the Habitat II Conference. The long-term impact and sustainability of commitments by Governments and the international community would depend on the political will to implement them, however. At the national level, Kenya had undertaken a number of activities in preparation for the conference, including the identification, selection and submission of "best practices" to the Habitat II secretariat.

42. His delegation was concerned that, in the course of streamlining the United Nations Centre at Nairobi, a large number of General Service staff members were likely to be retrenched. In its efforts to reduce waste and deal with its financial crisis, the Organization should ensure maximum rational use of existing facilities. His delegation was concerned about the very low rate of use of the conference facilities in Nairobi and requested the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to ensure rational allocation and utilization of those facilities in order to enhance their cost-effectiveness.

43. Mr. Stadthagen (Nicaragua), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

44. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that the pressure arising from population growth and the trend towards concentration in urban areas had made the task of national Governments more complex and demanded more of their scarce resources. When existing plans failed to keep pace with staggering urban population growth, giving rise to inadequate infrastructure and services, it was not surprising that a large proportion of the 700 million inhabitants of developing countries were dwelling in inadequate shelter and millions were homeless. Recurrent natural disasters also frustrated attempts to provide shelter, and migration to urban areas as a result further complicated urban support services.

45. The guidelines for national action contained in the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 placed particular emphasis on improving institutional and legal frameworks in the shelter sector. In Bangladesh, the Government, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, was testing a housing credit delivery system, as well as methods of improving supply, delivery and durability of building materials appropriate to the rural poor in flood-prone areas. Low-cost housing was another important area of Government activity. Moreover, the Constitution of Bangladesh stated that it was a fundamental responsibility of the State to assure its citizens the basic necessities of life, including shelter.

46. Bangladesh was participating actively in the preparatory process for Habitat II and hoped that it would result in a declaration of global policy and strategy better suited to current challenges.

47. Mr. DADA (Pakistan) said that the negotiations on the substantive documents to be adopted by Habitat II were in trouble because of the unwillingness on the part of certain key countries, during the discussions of the informal drafting group on the global plan of action, to address the international cooperation dimension of human settlements. The refusal to deal with that question was based on three arguments. First, it was suggested that human settlements was not a critical issue meriting strong and concerted international action. That argument was not worth entertaining because the problems of the shelterless, the slum dwellers and the inhabitants of urban areas with deficient civic amenities were so severe and caused such acute human misery, that they needed to be addressed with the utmost urgency. Also, those problems were a cause of social ills and political unrest. That was why the urgent need for focusing on human settlements had been acknowledged by international development institutions; indeed, the World Bank alone was financing 11,000 projects in that area.

48. Secondly, it was stressed that national Governments must resume primary responsibility in that area. While that responsibility was undeniable, it did not preclude the need for international cooperation. That same argument would be equally applicable in the areas of human rights, the environment, and gender equality.

49. Thirdly, it was argued that the international community could not offer much in support of national efforts in the area of human settlements. That was incorrect. In any developing country, the essential prerequisites for achieving the objectives of shelter for all were land and finance at affordable prices and the provision of appropriate technology. To fulfil those prerequisites, international cooperation was needed at the macro and micro levels to help

remove trade barriers, resolve the debt problem and promote the transfer of technology. The sharing of international experiences and expertise in the running of large metropolitan areas, and the exchange of know-how would be useful in a number of areas such as inexpensive building materials, mass transport systems, economic sanitation and water supply schemes.

50. With a view to attaining the objective of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, his Government had, inter alia, carried out studies to mark out the parameters of the housing problem, launched a national action programme aimed at making up the annual housing deficit as well as clearing the backlog, and was setting up a revolving housing fund to initiate inexpensive housing projects.

51. As national efforts alone were insufficient to address the specific question of providing shelter for all, his delegation hoped that Habitat II would result in practical commitments by all actors to address the human settlements issue.

52. Mr. RUDENSKY (Russian Federation) said that the problem of human settlements, which encompassed social, economic, industrial, technological, administrative and environmental aspects, had taken on a global dimension. Moreover, it was in the megalopolis that promising models for environmentally sustainable economic and social development were being tested. It was already clear that the development of human settlements in the twenty-first century would be influenced by current structural changes in the world economy, the establishment of a global information infrastructure and the adoption of non-polluting technological and industrial processes. Those factors should be taken into account when developing recommendations for national strategies for sustainable urban development.

53. The provisions of Commission on Human Settlements resolution 15/11 regarding the use of non-polluting energy sources in transportation and urban construction and the safety of human settlements should be taken into account in the establishment of a working relationship between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, and on Energy for Development.

54. His delegation attached great importance to the preparatory process for Habitat II but felt that the problems of economies in transition had not been duly reflected in its work, as called for by resolution 15/5. With regard to the draft final document for the Conference, good progress had been achieved on the preamble and on section II, "Goals and principles". The need to achieve an optimal balance between the public and private sector in national housing policy, while ensuring a proper role for local authorities, non-governmental organizations and women, must be reflected, however. Reaching the necessary levels of financing would require good will on the part of all members of the international community, as well. The forthcoming session of the Preparatory Committee would be of great significance, and his delegation would work to ensure its success.

55. Mrs. RADUCHOWSKA-BROCHWICZ (Poland), referring to resolution 15/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements, said that because of the complex problems they

faced in the area of housing, countries with economies in transition deserved special attention and cooperation at the policy formulation and implementation stages, in particular with respect to capacity-building in the area of shelter and human settlements. In the preparations for Habitat II, more emphasis should be placed on the need to build social infrastructure in urban and rural settlements. In that connection, more attention should be given to the rehabilitation of areas affected by armed conflicts and local wars, particularly the provision of shelter for displaced persons and refugees.

56. Steps should also be taken to promote the exchange of experiences at both national and international levels and the appropriate organizations of the United Nations system as well as other international and non-governmental organizations should develop networking and twinning arrangements, taking advantage of the activities generated by the preparatory process.

57. Mr. ŽEBRAKOVSKÝ (Czech Republic) said that while he considered it very appropriate for the General Assembly to regularly review the main Habitat-related activities including the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 and the preparations for Habitat II, great care should be taken in undertaking such preparations. Setting modest but realistic and well-targeted objectives would serve the Conference's purposes much better than trying to formulate far-reaching goals which might never be implemented even if they were adopted.

58. Although preparations for Habitat II appeared to be moving in the right direction, negotiations concerning such crucial elements as institutional arrangements and commitments were yet to be completed. In that regard, his delegation hoped that the Committee's discussions would contribute to the adoption of a strong, focused, well-balanced and realistic document in Istanbul.

59. Housing and urban problems were among the most difficult problems facing his country in its period of transition. That was why his Government sought international cooperation and assistance in that sector while being increasingly prepared to provide support and share its experience.

60. The regional level was the natural platform for the international coverage of human settlements and housing problems as well as an appropriate point of departure for the global debate. His country, which had been elected to the Commission on Human Settlements, had for the first time made a voluntary contribution to support the activities of Habitat II. Commending the Habitat secretariat and the Preparatory Committee for their efforts to place as much information and as many documents as possible on the Internet, he expressed the hope that in future, both the United Nations Secretariat and delegations would work extensively through the electronic documentation medium.

61. Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka) said that the issue of providing adequate shelter for all human beings appeared to have become a core concern of the international community. In his country, significant strides had been made in providing shelter for the people, primarily for the poor through various programmes. While most efforts in that field had been undertaken through Government agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organizations had also been encouraged to participate in the shelter strategy and in enhancing the quality of housing and living standards. That strategy had enabled the Government to

foster the people's participation through self-help schemes. While Sri Lanka valued international cooperation and expertise in that sphere, it had successfully employed indigenous solutions to eradicate homelessness and related problems. The contribution of Habitat in that regard was widely appreciated.

62. In the context of the rapid urbanization of the world's population and the attendant social and economic crises, the theme of Habitat II as a conference on cities was appropriate. His delegation believed that the conclusions to be drawn at that Conference would highlight some problems and solutions likely to help in the preparation of a more holistic approach to the provision of shelter and the improvement of living conditions. In order to facilitate participation at the Conference at the highest possible level, the international community should provide adequate support and assistance to the Conference secretariat.

63. Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) said that the current draft of the Habitat agenda was sometimes at variance with the Rio principles and that it dealt with issues which were beyond the expertise of the Commission on Human Settlements and the Secretariat. In that regard, he supported the call from the representative of Japan for greater focus on the draft agenda and for increased involvement of the Economic and Social Council in the preparations of the Conference.

64. His delegation supported the concept of the government as enabler and believed that the government worked best when it empowered people to make decisions rather than deciding for them. Such fundamental principles needed to be respected consistently throughout the document.

65. While States bore primary responsibility for development, shelter decisions were more often than not made by individuals. Habitat II must therefore be about helping people to make those micro-decisions which must be incorporated into a sustainable whole. Any document which emphasized a government-oriented approach, unrealistic expectations of both central and local authorities and unproductive government interventions would be unacceptable to his Government. Rather, his Government proposed a partnership which would be driven at the local level and supported at the municipal, state and central government levels. The Habitat II agenda must ultimately give adequate weight to the role of essential actors in the shelter sector such as local authorities, neighbourhood associations, non-governmental organizations and women as well as highlight the importance of transparency, civic engagement and public participation in all levels of decision-making on all human settlements issues.

66. The United States had a national housing policy which continually strived for an appropriate balance between the public and private sectors. To be effective, the agenda must stress that the basis for success lay in individual and community-based activities within a framework of government facilitation. The United States opposed the creation of a new right to housing. A distinction needed to be made between needs and basic human rights.

67. He strongly supported equal access, which expanded individual choice and community involvement, whereas equitable access often reduced choice. In that regard, equity was no substitute. While the emphasis of the Habitat II agenda on urban issues reflected the realities that the world would face in the twenty-

first century, it did not adequately reflect the importance of the vital links between rural and urban areas. There must be realistic policies which ensured that secondary sectors were sustainable and that their links with the surrounding food-producing regions were strengthened in appropriate ways.

68. Similarly, the sections dealing with land use also needed to recognize that a balanced approach in that area was crucial to ensuring that all essential needs, including land for natural resources protection and food production were included. Human settlements, more than any other element in the sustainable development equation, depended on the individual and the community, acting within a framework established and protected at the national level.

69. His Government wanted Habitat II to succeed and had made available a supplementary contribution beyond the normal United States annual contribution to the Secretariat for that purpose. In that connection, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was playing a key role in funding the preparation of national plans by developing countries, especially African countries.

70. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) said that the problems of human settlements were an integral part of international sustainable development. Her delegation commended the broad international cooperation for the preparation of the Habitat II Conference and the significant activities conducted by the regional commissions. For example, the Economic Commission for Europe had held a conference on countries with economies in transition which had provided an opportunity for States to exchange experiences and identify common interests.

71. Cooperation regarding human settlements among members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was going well. Those States were adapting the Housing Indicators Programme to conditions in countries in transition. An overall analysis of regional measures, including development trends in various national policies, would be based on the criteria for identifying "best practices".

72. The recommendations of the Preparatory Committee were being taken into account in Kazakstan. The two-year national plan of action was aimed at establishing a social safety net and a legal framework. Human settlements development was one of the main components of its overall national development policy. Structural adjustment of economies did have a negative impact on housing policy, however, and Kazakstan and other countries in transition needed technical and financial support in order to implement the preparatory process. Over 100 countries had established national preparatory committees, demonstrating their interest in healthy, secure and sustainable human settlements.

73. In conclusion, her delegation supported the view of the Secretary-General that Habitat II should be the culmination of the series of world conferences and summits held in recent years and should transform their recommendations into effective actions for human settlements.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.